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SUBJECT: A/S Jones meets with GoE officials on Health, Science, and Technology Issues

REF: CAIRO 162

¶1. (SBU) Key Points:

--In January 20 meetings, A/S Jones emphasized that health, science, and technology cooperation form an important component of the US-Egypt relationship and stated OES's desire to bolstering collaboration.

--According to Higher Education and Science Research Minister Hany Helal, the Egyptian government (GoE) has identified renewable energy, health, agriculture, and water as key national science and technology priorities.

--Health Minister Hatem El-Gabaly agreed to support USG programs in combating polio in OIC-afflicted countries as well as the recently announced Global Health Initiative.

--A roundtable discussion with Egyptian scientists revealed strong support for the US-Egypt science and technology fund but also concerns about inadequate grant funding, inadequate review feedback and insufficient time to complete research projects.

¶2. (U) A/S Jones explained in all of her meetings that the US remains committed to expanding existing partnerships with the Egyptian government and scientific community and looks forward to working together on health, science, and technology programs. During her January 20 visit, A/S Jones also met with Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials and delivered the Copenhagen Accord demarche (Ref A).

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

¶3. (SBU) Higher Education and Scientific Research Minister Helal explained the Ministry is working closely with the Prime Minister's Supreme Council on Science and Technology (Ref B), to identify national science and technology priorities and has directed the Science and Technology Development Fund (STDF) to serve as the lead organization to support research proposals addressing these issues. He stated that STDF - a Ministry organization created in 2007 to manage inter-government science and technology policy - will seek to finance programs in renewable energy, health, agriculture, and water. Helal noted that the Ministry would also like to raise financial support to the US-Egypt Science and Technology Contribution Fund (STCF), increasing annual contributions from 2 to 5 million USD from both countries.

¶4. (SBU) A/S Jones said the US agrees that financial contributions for STCF need to be expanded and discussions are underway to consider such an increase. She also expressed concern about the low acceptance of submitted proposals, noting that the current 8%

success rate has the potential to discourage scientists from applying for funding. A/S Jones also urged the Ministry to continue providing written explanations for rejected research proposals and to provide opportunities to resubmit them. Helal pledged the Ministry's support and also stated his desire to continue dialogue regarding increased financial support for STCF.

Ministry of Health

¶15. (SBU) Health Minister El-Gabaly told A/S Jones that Egypt attributes part of its success in lowering its H5N1 mortality rate to USG public awareness programs, calling them "tremendously helpful health activities." El-Gabaly stated that the Ministry will gladly support USG plans to combat polio in Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sudan as well and looks forward to participating in the new Global Health Initiative. "I'm pro-US cooperation," El-Gabaly explained and stated that he hopes the US will assume a larger leadership role in developing new science, technology, and health programs in Egypt and across the region. A/S Jones asked El-Gabaly to contribute to the planning for the April 2010 pandemic influenza meeting in Hanoi and the Minister agreed.

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US-Egypt Science and Technology Fund Participants

¶16. (SBU) In a meeting with 14 scientists - all of them former participants in STCF programs - A/S Jones said that the US is firmly committed to American and Egyptian research and recognizes the need for increased funding. The group, which consisted primarily of Junior Scientist visitor alumnae (a program that provides funds for short-term training at US institutions), noted the overall success of STCF in offering financial assistance for a multitude of research areas but also identified several areas for improvement. A lack of communication in explaining the reason for rejecting research proposals, insufficient funds to support Egyptian scientists working in the US, and delays in approving projects were listed as continuing problems. A/S Jones offered to raise these concerns with the MoHE and urged those in attendance to seek new ways to collaborate with US researchers. She also suggested that information regarding the fund and other funding opportunities be provided on-line.

¶17. (U) A/S Jones cleared this message.
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